



For Immediate Release

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Talbot County's New Children's Health Initiative to Address Impact of Childhood Trauma

Did you know that research and trends are indicating that children today have more early childhood trauma than their parents?

A new Children's Health Initiative, a collaboration between the Talbot County Health Department (TCHD), Talbot County Public Schools (TCPS), and Talbot County Department of Social Services (TCDSS), provides an early intervention program for children in kindergarten through second grade with mild to moderate adjustment problems to classroom settings that produce behavioral problems. The initiative is based on studies that early childhood investments decrease the risk for many physical, behavioral, and social problems later in life.

The first year, the initiative was able to increase capacity in several areas without new county funds, however, this year, Talbot County Government is investing \$100,000 in the FY2020 school health budget to support the initiative. The additional funds will predominately fund behavioral health trained workers to assist children with coping and adjustment skills, self-confidence, and interpersonal relationships using theraplay.

Fredia Wadley, MD, Health Officer, Talbot County Health Department, points to research by James J. Heckman, PhD, a Nobel Memorial Prize winner in economics and an expert in the economics of human development, which says that the best investment is in quality early childhood development from birth to five for disadvantaged children and their families. Dr. Wadley explains, "The children

born now will be less prepared for success in life unless we do something during their early development to give them a healthy start.”

Heckman further explains in his research that adverse early environments across the economic spectrum create deficits in skills and abilities that drive down productivity and increase social costs—thereby adding to financial deficits borne by the public. According to research done by the Talbot County Health Department, 39 percent of Talbot County children live in single-parent households and there are 216 homeless students in Talbot County. In addition, there are a number of children in the county who are experiencing trauma with parents who have addiction and mental health problems. Multigenerational poverty, people living longer, a more mobile population, along with advances in Internet technology have all impacted this breakdown of the family support structure.

Kelly Griffith, Superintendent of the Talbot County Public Schools, comments about the collaborative, “We are all working with the same families. We came to a common understanding around educating our community about early intervention and prevention so we can be more proactive.”

There had been a collaborative 10 years ago between the Talbot County Public Schools and Channel Marker, Inc. through a Substance Abuse and Mental Services Administration (SAMSA) grant which addressed some of these issues. After the grant ran out, the number of children helped in Talbot County schools was reduced from 90 students to 30 students in Kindergarten through second grade. Dr. Wadley adds, “We looked at existing services, asking what were their capacity and where were the gaps, and started there.”

Accomplishment to date include: 1) adding a second employee to both the Healthy Families Program in TCHD and the Infant and Toddlers Program in TCPS; 2) adding a social worker to county elementary schools to support high-risk students and their families; 3) implementing a five day program with new federal dollars at the Family Support Center (Early Head Start) for children that will allow mothers to work; 4) implementing a Sobriety Treatment and Recovery Team (START) program through TCDSS and TCHD to help mothers using drugs get treatment and support for their children; 5) hosted “Healing Neen,” the first conference on Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs), and “Resiliency,” a movie by James Redford about what children need to cope with adversity; and 6)

establishing through TCHD a telehealth program with Johns Hopkins for three specialty pediatric clinics.

Among the goals of the initiative are to 1) get children born healthy; 2) concentrate on early childhood development and the prevention and mitigation of ACEs; 3) increase the percentage with school readiness skills and competencies, and 4) provide early detection of behavioral problems and services for behavioral modification.

The Children's Health Initiative continues to seek new partners. For All Seasons has come on board to supplement the work being done by Eastern Shore Psychological Services in the schools. Through their ACE trained professionals, For All Season is also able to provide ACE training for the community. Corey Pack, President of the Talbot County Council, comments, "We applaud these efforts as new partners are being brought on board as the initiative moves forward."

The group started meeting when Griffith became Superintendent of the Talbot County Public Schools and she realized she needed help in meeting the needs for her families. Linda Webb, Director of the Talbot County Department of Social Services, reflects, "Our relationship is unique. As a newcomer to Talbot County, it has been valuable in helping me to learn the landscape here. And, our work together is making a real impact on expanding services in the community."

Dr. Wadley points to changing demographics in Talbot County and the need to educate the public about these needs. She concludes, "Not everyone is seeing the needs we have in the county. In addition, people don't know about our services and how to use them. Sharing our resources to meet the growing needs is critical."

Photo: A new Children's Health Initiative, currently between the Talbot County Health Department (TCHD), Talbot County Public Schools (TCPS), and Talbot County Department of Social Services (TCDSS), provides an early intervention program for children in kindergarten through second grade with mild to moderate adjustment problems to classroom setting that produce behavioral problems. Pictured left to right are Fredia S. Wadley, MD, Health Officer, TCHD; Kelly Griffith, Superintendent, TCPS; and Linda Webb, Director, TCDSS.